

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Robert Chambers

SUMMARY OVERVIEW

This paper draws on and develops three sources of practical analysis and experience - that of reversing the biases of the normal; that of practical political economy; and that of participatory rural appraisal - and examines their practical implications for rural development policy and practice in India. It does not aspire to award praise or blame, or to cover all aspects. It pays less attention to what is already being done than to what might be done. Selectively, it identifies directions and actions, some already evident, and some new, where practical realism and recent experience point to anti-poverty opportunities for the 1990s and beyond.

It argues that in the search for more equitable and effective rural development, "we" (non-rural professionals) are part of the problem. Normal bureaucracy, normal professionalism, normal careers, and normal modes of learning interlock to sustain centralised, standardised and simplistic perceptions, prescriptions and programmes. The environments and livelihood strategies of the poorer are often, in contrast, dispersed, diverse and complex. Some reversals to decentralise, diversify, and encourage demand from below have occurred, and more are proposed. A promising recent development is the approach and methods of participatory rural appraisal (PRA). To accelerate reversals, and enable the poor to gain more of what they want and need, four themes and some of their practical implications are examined:

- * abolishing restrictions and simplifying rules which hurt the poor
- * using communications to inform and empower the poor
- * reversals of normal bureaucracy and professionalism
- * promoting personal and institutional change through participatory rural appraisal

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PART 1: PRACTICAL ANALYSIS

Rates and Nature of Change

The context is not just change but accelerating change. In global politics (in the USSR, in Eastern Europe, in Southern Africa, in West Asia...) change in the past two years has been unexpected, dramatic and bewildering. And in our human view of our planet and environment, Nature is no longer a comforting permanence, but a degrading greenhouse of our own making. Changes in conditions and in world views are now so rapid and radical that it is as though change itself has changed. The unthinkable becomes thinkable; the undoable becomes doable. It is both privilege and responsibility to be alive at such a time. Perhaps more than ever before in human history, we - the human community - need vision, will and a nimble and practical realism.

These changes and needs resonate with those affecting rural poverty and development in India. Rural change too is accelerating. Not least, there are revolutions in rural communications and expectations. The television which brought the Mahabharata to countless millions of the poor also brought advertisements for middle class consumer goods. Awareness and aspirations have been sharpened and raised. What people think and want and see as possible now are not what they thought and wanted and saw as possible ten, or even five, years ago. In a democracy, politicians are, and have to be, adept at keeping up with, and even leading, such change. Others, though, are more liable to lag in understanding and action. They include many professionals who are isolated and secure in the bastions of learning and privilege - universities, large bureaucracies, and urban elites. In consequence, an underlying hypothesis of this paper is that ideas about rural deprivation and development articulated in universities and bureaucracies, and among urban elites, are in permanent danger of being out of touch and out of date; and that precisely because of these lags and lacunae, rural development policy and practice present opportunities for new analysis and practical action.

The Normal: Professionalism, Bureaucracy, Behaviour and Learning

(Normal = usual; regular; common; typical: the normal way of doing it; the normal level. The Collins English Dictionary 2nd ed 1986)

Let us start with the normal. Four forms of normality can be seen to interlock to deter and delay change in perception and prescription in rural development.

i. normal professionalism

Normal professionalism is the concepts, values, methods and behaviour dominant in a profession. These are taught in schools and universities, where they are sustained by conservative curricula and successive editions of hallowed textbooks written and rewritten by ageing men; and they are reinforced by professional associations, by promotions boards, by journal editors and their anonymous reviewers, and by the norms of specialised bureaucracies. In general, normal professionalism values things more than people, men more than women, measurement more than judgement, and the urban and industrial more than the rural and agricultural.

ii. normal bureaucracy

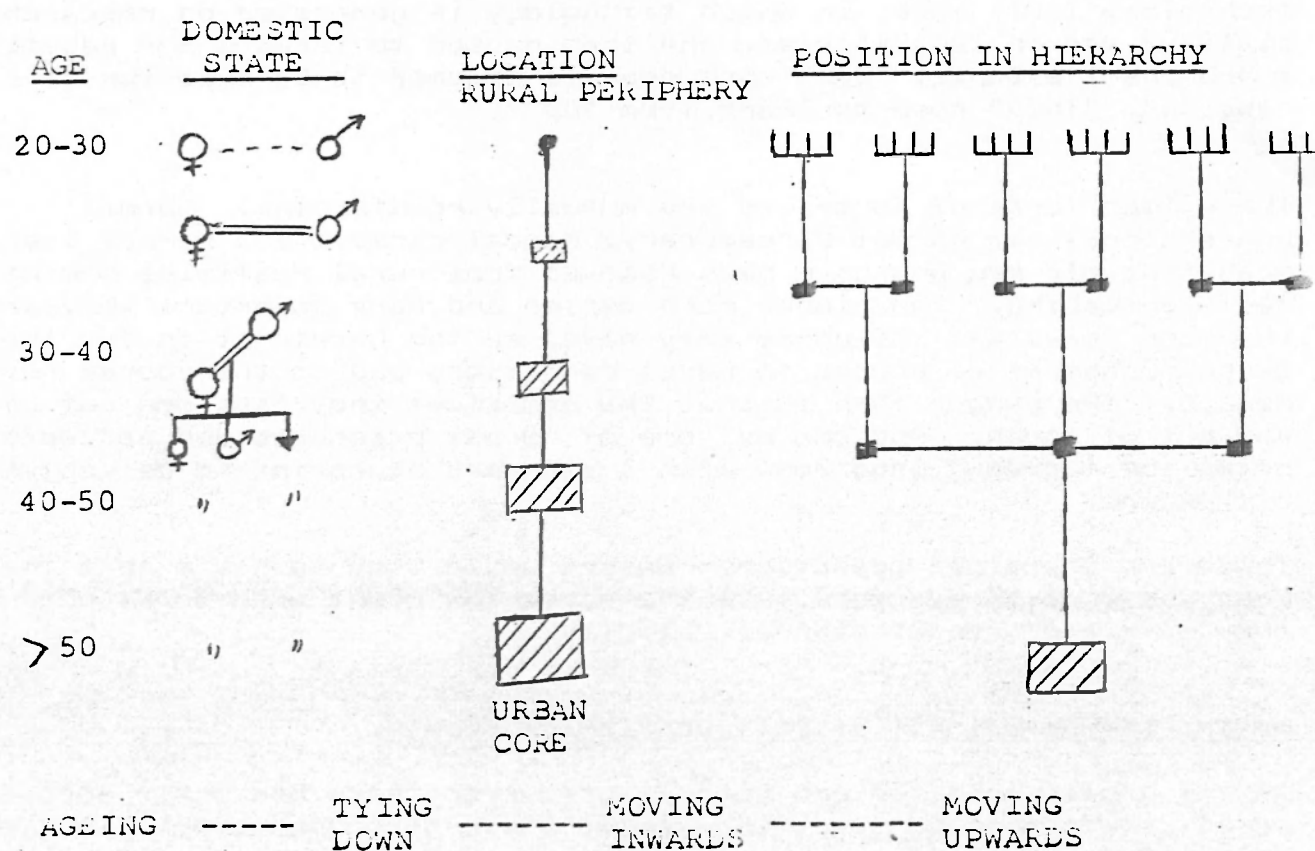
Normal bureaucracy is the values, methods and behaviour dominant in large, organisations, especially those of government. Its features typically include centralisation and standardisation: centralisation of authority, especially financial control; and standardisation of rules, recommendations and actions.

iii. normal careers

Typical domestic and career cycles in rural development present three related trends: tying down; moving inwards; and moving upwards (see Figure 1). As professionals gain in age and experience, they are progressively tied down, and women more than men, by marriage and the care and education of children; they move inwards into larger and larger urban centres; and they move upwards in hierarchies. These three processes interlock to distance them more and more from rural contact and realities.

FIGURE 1

NORMAL SUCCESSFUL DOMESTIC AND CAREER SEQUENCES
(MAINLY MALE)



iv. normal learning

Normal learning is dominated by urban-based professionals. It has two sides: learning by them about rural life and conditions; and learning from them by rural people.

Learning by urban-based professionals has two main modes, both liable to mislead: rural development tourism - the brief, urban-based rural visit; and large-scale questionnaire surveys with their distortions and inaccuracies. The older, more senior and more important a person becomes, the more biased his (they are usually men) rural visits and perceptions, and the greater his reliance on statistics from surveys.

Learning by rural people is assumed to be through the transfer of knowledge to them from professionals. In agriculture, the transfer-of-technology (TOT) mode, in which technology is generated on research stations and in laboratories, and then passed to farmers for adoption, is a prominent example. "Our" knowledge is assumed to be superior to "theirs". "They" need to learn from "us".

These four forms of normality are mutually reinforcing. Normal professionalism, normal bureaucracy, normal careers and normal learning mean that old men who have been removed from rural realities dominate decision-making. The older, more senior and more important they are, and the more power and influence they have, so the harder it is for them to gain unconstrained access to rural conditions and to the poorer rural people. The danger then is that the decisions they take are out of date and out of touch. And the outcome of normal pressures and perceptions is often the top-down programme with a standard blueprint to be implemented everywhere.

These are one-sided assertions. No one would wish to claim that they apply everywhere or to everyone. All the same, few might wish to dispute that they have a degree of general validity.

Making the Normal Fit by Differentiating Supply

Normal professionalism and normal bureaucracy have had their successes in rural development in conditions where their strengths fit. Two types of conditions stand out.

The first is where there is a robust physical technology which works well almost anywhere. Railways, electricity power supplies, roads, dams, some water pumps, blackboards - these are physical examples where blueprints are needed and work.

The second is where there is an extensive environment which is uniform and stable. Green revolution packages for the flat, fertile well watered plains of Northwest India, and immunisation for human and animal bodies which are homeostatically controlled within narrow tolerances - these are examples where a standard intervention - a "magic bullet" - can sometimes be powerful and effective because of a large-scale standard receiving environment.

The error has been to suppose that the top-down approach of the standard package which worked for the green revolution, or of the magic bullet which works with immunisation, will work in other environments and conditions which are more diverse, complex, uncontrolled and unpredictable. Compared with the uniform, simple and controlled farming systems of green revolution agriculture, most rainfed farming systems are complex, diverse and risk-prone. Compared with the predictable conditions in the human body, the physical, social and economic conditions found in a canal irrigation system, in a watershed, in a forest, in a village, or even in a household livelihood, are more diverse, complex and unpredictable. Further, whereas normal science is reductionist and normal packages and programmes are simple and simplifying, poor people often seek to complicate and diversify their farming systems and their livelihood strategies to reduce risk and to improve their wellbeing. In consequence, for diverse, complex and risk-prone environments and livelihoods, and for programmes concerning people (not just the insides of their bodies) as well as things, the experience with top-down, centre-outwards standardised blueprints has often been dim, and sometimes dismal.

Examples can be cited from five specialised domains where standard top-down packages have worked badly. In canal irrigation, examples are 8 hectare chaks, and the unimplementable Seventh Plan target of 8 million hectares under warabandi. In lift irrigation, the standard design and command sizes of the World Bank tubewells in Uttar Pradesh stand out. In watershed development, a similar pattern is shown by the prescriptions first of contour earth bunds, and later of khus (Vetiver) grass, to be implemented in different environments on a large scale. In social forestry, the obvious case is the big push for eucalyptus in farm and community forestry. Finally, in agriculture, the top-down mode has been embodied in the concept of the high-yielding green revolution package to be promoted over large areas in rainfed conditions. All these were, or are, standardised, top-down, centre-outwards prescriptions, some deriving from the relatively uniform and controlled conditions of Northwest India and transferred to more diverse and less controllable conditions elsewhere. All were relatively simple. All were administratively convenient. All ran into problems because they did not fit or respond to diverse and complex local conditions and needs.

In all five domains, recent years have seen a shift towards differentiation. In canal irrigation, the National Water Management Project promotes separate diagnosis for each irrigation system, leading to individually tailored operational plans. In lift irrigation, the importance of better management of electricity to ensure a more predictable supply is increasingly acknowledged, including the desirability of different supply regimes for water-abundant and water-scarce zones. In watershed management, the rhetoric of participation is being given some substance, for example in Karnataka, with more openness to local needs and variation. In social forestry, nurseries which used to be dominated by eucalyptus, are now found with a wider variety of species. In agricultural research and extension, diversity has been categorised and detailed with the identification of 127 agroclimatic or agroecological zones.

An industrial analogy of the direction of these shifts is the comparison of Henry Ford's standard batch production of automobiles, and Toyota's differentiated diversity. Henry Ford said that the American public could have its Model T Ford any colour it liked as long as it was black. In contrast, the cars coming off the Toyota production line are all different, each fitted to the demands of an individual client.

The changes listed above in these five domains do not, however, go the whole way to a "Toyota" mode which fits and meets individual demand. Rather, they are forms of top down, centre-outwards, differentiation, a differentiation of supply. They begin to distinguish different systems, zones and types of clients, and some of them present an a la carte instead

TABLE 1 LONG-TERM TRENDS

	FROM	TOP-DOWN SUPPLY
	STANDARDISED	
CANAL IRRIGATION	8 ha chaks warabandi (8 m.ha) pipe committees	
LIFT IRRIGATION	World Bank Tubewells	
WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT	Earth bunds Khus grass	
SOCIAL FORESTRY	Plantations Eucalyptus Acacia nilotica on foreshores	
AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND EXTENSION	Green revolution packages "IR8"	
LONG-TERM TRENDS	1970s, 1980s	
INDUSTRIAL PARALLEL	Henry Ford any colour as long as it is black	

IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND PRACTICE

TO

BOTTOM-UP

DEMAND

→ DIFFERENTIATED →

← DIVERSE ←

→ National Water Management
→ Project
→ System-specific plans

↔

Farmers' rights to water
Communications
Organisation, Accountability
of management

→ Power supply management
→ Zoning policy

↔

Buyers' markets for water
Abolish spacing in WA areas

→ Technology options given
→ to farmers

↔

Participatory appraisal and
planning by farmers

→ Protection for Natural
→ Regeneration
→ Diversified nurseries

↔

Livelihood forestry
Farmers' rights to harvest
and transit
Community forest management

→ National Agricultural Research
→ Project
→ 120 agroecological zones
→ Minikits

↔

"Farmer first" approaches
farmer participatory research.
Search for baskets of choice

→ →

←

→ DESIRABLE
1990s, 21st CENTURY →

Toyota
each client chooses

of a fixed menu, an open basket of choices in place of a closed package. But they do not go the whole way. The menu is still chosen by the cook; the contents of the basket are still selected by the vendor. The further step is for the client to select the ingredients and even do the cooking; for the client to choose the contents of the basket and even fill it herself or himself. The next step is the articulation and differentiation of demand, as in the full Toyota analogy, with much fuller participation by the client. The implications for the five specialised programmes are suggested in table 1.

Parallels to these shifts to differentiated supply can be found in mainstream "generalist" anti-poverty programmes. The IRDP norms and targets have been standard for every block, but other programmes have been differentiated according to districtwise conditions: for example the Drought-prone Areas Programme, the Tribal Area Development Programme, the Hill Areas development Programme, the Desert Development Programme, and most recently the September 1990 decision to implement a rural employment guarantee programme in at least 50 of the poorest districts (Newstime 26 September 1990). Yet other programmes have differentiated by person, as the IRDP itself does, and as with the SFDA, TRYSEM, DWCRA and the RLEGP. Tendencies within such programmes to standardise are reportedly common, as a feature of normal bureaucracy, but the intention is to differentiate and target top-down supply to benefit the more deprived areas and people. The question is whether these modifications of the normal go far enough, or whether for fit and sustainability they need also to be drawn down and differentiated by demand, from the bottom up.

Reversals of the Normal: Diversity, Decentralisation and Demand

The various philosophies of "bottom-up" development, of empowerment of the poor, of participation, and of putting the poor first, all imply not just modifications, but reversals of the normal. For brevity some of these are listed in table 2.

TABLE 2 REVERSALS FOR DIVERSITY AND REALISM

	<u>NORMAL TENDENCIES</u>	<u>NEW-NEEDED REVERSALS</u>
PROFESSIONALISM	Things first	People first
	Men before women	Women before men
	Professionals set priorities	Poor people set priorities
	Transfer of technology	Choice of technology
BUREAUCRACY	Centralise	Decentralise
	Standardise	Diversify
	Simplify	Complicate
CAREERS AND BEHAVIOUR	Tying down (family)	Also releasing
	Inwards (urban)	Also outwards (rural)
	Upwards (hierarchy)	Also downwards (field, villages)
MODES OF LEARNING	From "above"	From "below"
	Rural development tourism	Rapid and participatory rural appraisal
	Questionnaire surveys	Participatory Learning Methods
	Measurement and statistics	Ranking, scoring, and self-critical judgement

The reversals are to offset the biases of the normal.

The argument is that they need much additional weight to achieve anything like an optimal balance.

TABLE 3- PHYSICAL AND HUMAN PARADIGMS FOR DEVELOPMENT

	<u>PHYSICAL</u>	<u>HUMAN</u>
Point of departure	Things	People
Mode	Blueprint	Process
Goals	Predetermined	Evolutionary
Analytical assumptions (implicit)	Reductionist	Holistic
Key word	Planning	Participation
Focus of decision-making	Centralized	Decentralized
Relationship with clients	Controlling, motivating	Enabling, empowering
Methods	Standardised and universally applicable	Diverse and locally evolved and adapted
Technology for clients	A fixed package of practices	A varied basket of options
Project output	Infrastructure	Competence and choice

The most crucial reversal concerns priorities. Professionals assume that they know what poor people want and need, and what their priorities are or should be. In practice, both priorities and programmes are influenced by what is administratively convenient and easy and normal to measure. The poverty line, and poverty line thinking, which underlie and are used to assess the IRDP, express the normal professionalism which measures flows - of income or of consumption, rather than other dimensions of wellbeing. N.S.Jodha's (1988) longitudinal study of change in two villages in Rajasthan is here dramatically suggestive. He found that the 35 households which over 20 years had suffered declines in real per capita incomes of more than 5 per cent were on average better off according to 37 out of 38 of their own criteria, many of which concerned reduced vulnerability, greater independence, and enhanced self-respect. Poor people's priorities cannot be assumed. They vary and they change. And the experts on them are not professionals, but poor people themselves.

Another way of expressing the contrasts is through physical and human paradigms for development. Normal high status professionalism, dominated by engineers, economists, and scientists, deals with things, and with people as though they were things, leaving the complexities and diversities of real individual people to low status nurses, extension workers and social workers. Much experience and analysis, most notably that of David Korten (e.g. 1980, 1984), has shown that effective rural development requires a shift of stress from things to people, from blueprints to process, and from planning to participation - all of these entailing reversals of the normal.

Throughout there is a theme of reversals to achieve the three Ds - diversity, decentralisation and demand. Diversity exists, and often needs to be enhanced to enable the poor to gain better livelihoods. Decentralisation is one mode of action, but unless matched by effective demand can lead to capture by local elites, as some fear will occur with the recent decentralisation. Decentralisation is by definition top-down, even though its intention is bottom-up. The key question is how it can be complemented by effective demand by the poorer, how they can be empowered to claim their rights and entitlements.

With points such as these in mind, most of those committed to the reduction and elimination of rural deprivation would probably agree on the need to shift programmes and action more and more to the righthand side of tables 2 and 3, and to enable the poorer to organise, demand and get more of what they want and need. Many programmes and projects seek to do this, not least the IRDP and Jawahar Rozgar Yojana. There are many views and assessments of these programmes which will not be reviewed here. Rather the questions confronted in this paper are

- a. whether and how other points of leverage can be found where it is administratively and politically realistic to act, and
- b. whether there are ways in which the poor can be strengthened in claiming and gaining benefits from such programmes designed for their wellbeing.

Principles from Practical Political Economy

Any practical analysis has to take account of political and administrative realities. To analyse and prescribe for rural development without allowing for local political and administrative interests and interest groups would be both unscientific and irresponsible. Practical political economy is part of the search for realism. It entails the analysis of who will gain and who will lose from a policy or programme, and how this will affect implementation. Political and administrative feasibility is highest where all concerned can gain. Where some have to lose, or to forego gains they might have expected, countervailing power is needed to induce them to accept their loss. Much rural development policy does not confront these issues.

An assessment of who would gain and who would lose from 20 proposed measures concerning lift irrigation and trees (To the Hands of the Poor: Water and Trees p. 232) judged that the rural rich and less poor would gain, together with the rural poor, in 17 out of the 20, but that in almost all cases field-level officials would lose. This was largely because they would be deprived of powers and patronage which enable them to extract rents. Again and again, it seems, it is field staff, and perhaps contractors and local politicians, who stand to lose from effective implementation of programmes intended to benefit the poorer. Unless the losers are tackled, such programmes continue to be subverted and will not work well.

If this is so, there are five commonsense principles to apply to the design of rural development programmes:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| i. fit | good fit with what poor people want, need and see that they can get, so that they will demand them |
| ii. rights | legal and administrative rights to the poor to claim their entitlements |
| iii. knowledge | communication and knowledge of those rights and how to claim them |
| iv. empowerment | organisation and assistance to make claims |
| v. motivation and rewards | for officials and others who otherwise stand to lose, provision of training, procedures and incentives which will encourage commitment to the poor and induce and support personal change. |

These points are taken up below.

PART 2: PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The practical implications below do not cover much of the familiar ground of rural development. There are well known and more fully debated ways in which the Indian state seeks to enable and empower poor rural people, and which will not be considered here. Nothing that follows should be taken as devaluing these, to the extent that they do or can effectively benefit the poor, including as they do:

- * land reform
- * community organisation and management of natural resources
- * agricultural and food price and subsidy policies
- * reservation policy
- * competitive purchasing of what poor people sell (for example minor forest products)
- * safety nets for the most vulnerable: These include public works on demand (as with the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme), pensions for widows, food distribution in famine, and the like.
- * IRDP
- * Jawahar Rozgar Yojana

The focus here is not on these, however important they are and may remain, but on other opportunities which follow from the analysis above and which do not yet appear so prominently in the mainstream of thinking and action.

Dismantling the Disabling State

The quickest and most widespread way to empower and benefit many millions of the rural poor is to abolish rules and regulations which in practice, whatever the intention, hinder or harm them. All restrictions, all required permissions, all required signatures, all steps in bureaucratic processes are liable to discriminate against the poor by introducing uncertainty, delay, indirect costs in time spent in travel, waiting and supplication, and rents extracted by officials and agents. Further, they deter many, especially of the poorest and weakest, from even trying to claim their rights.

In this context, the experience gained in Ahmednagar District, and other districts which may have followed the Ahmednagar approach of simplifying rules and procedures, should provide useful lessons and pointers. Feedback from the experts, the poorer rural people, would be useful on how these changes have affected them.

The action which this thrust suggests is:

- * a systematic review of all rules and regulations, legal and administrative, of Government, in every department and domain, to establish a. whether in practice they are used to extract rents from the poor, and b. whether the benefits to the poor from abolition would outweigh the losses, if any, of other social benefits.

Review panels could include representatives of the very poor. Wherever possible, regulations would be abolished. Where retained, they would be simplified. Throughout, panels of the experts on these matters - poor people and sympathetic low-level staff - could act as consultants to advise on appropriate abolitions and simplifications. To take account of local diversity, review panels themselves would have to be decentralised to appropriate levels.

Two tragic cases of restrictions which hurt the poor can serve as examples of the opportunities. In both cases, restrictions designed for environmental protection and conservation in practice deter investment by the poor.

First, restrictions on harvesting and transit for trees on private land perversely discourage the planting and protection of trees. In those exceptional cases where species are known to be free of restrictions, as with eucalyptus in Haryana, Punjab and Gujarat, farmers have responded with planting on a massive (and environmentally questionable) scale. In the more common case, where harvesting and transit are restricted, farmers are usually reluctant to invest in trees. Marketing, if possible at all, involves hassle and uncertainty. Returns for timber and other tree products are low because of the need to pay off officials and others, and the consequent monopoly power of influential contractors. Evidence has been documented of returns to farmers from trees and tree products in 12 cases between 1983 and 1988 (TTHOTF:185). In 8 cases, sellers received only between 2.5 and 19 per cent of the price prevailing in market outlets, and the highest of all 12 cases was only 43 per cent.

Evidence from many sources indicates that once farmers are confident that they can harvest and market trees and tree products freely, and where they have secure tenure, they invest in trees as savings banks, and refrain from cashing them except in serious need. Trees planted in this way can be doubly valuable environmentally: as trees in themselves, greening the farmland of India; and also providing security and capital as savings, substituting for livestock which would otherwise overgraze the commons.

The action which follows is

* to abolish all restrictions on harvesting and transit for trees on private land (TTHOTF 170 - 196)

A second case is spacing norm restrictions for bores and wells in water-abundant areas. These discriminate against those who need credit to sink wells or bores. Others with their own funds go ahead anyway. Those who are restricted are the poorer who have to seek official credit. And where water is abundant, more wells and bores mean more competitive water markets to the benefit of buyers (who are often poorer and smaller farmers), and in some places reduces waterlogging.

The practical implication is

* to abolish spacing norm restrictions for lift irrigation systems in water-abundant areas (TTHOTF 66-8, 136-7)

Rights, Information and Power

Perhaps the biggest opportunity to empower the poor, and which is growing but still largely untapped, is the use of information and communications.

That knowledge is power is a commonplace. That ignorance is weakness is less often said. That keeping people ignorant is a means of retaining and exploiting power and of extracting rents is also true, but less often remarked on.

Again and again and again, in every domain, access to information, and especially knowledge of regulations and rights, is a key to empowering the poorer. Some opportunities have already been mentioned. To recapitulate and add, examples include knowledge of rights to the following:

- to harvest and transit trees and tree products, including which trees are exempt from restrictions
- to obtain forms and permissions free, and without delay, without paying for them
- to receive water on canal irrigation systems, and to knowledge of where water is going
- to credit, and to the procedures for obtaining it
- to loans at or below interest ceilings

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- to land title deeds, and how to obtain them
 - to access to forest produce, and to minimum prices for their sale
 - to common property resources, and where, when and how
 - to usufruct or shares of usufruct, and where, when and how
 - to employment guarantee schemes
 - to minimum wages
 - to compensation for injury, damage or loss of property resulting from government action

-
- to claim maintenance when deserted, and how to get it
 - to schools where the teachers turn up and teach
 - to clinics with drugs

and the list could be extended.

Locally there is much that NGOs can do, and that some already do, in legal literacy camps, in informing people of their rights, and in teaching them how to pester and persist, how to write letters and to whom, and so on. But for reasons of scale and coverage, the main chance is what Government organisations can themselves do.

A positive example is the campaign in Warangal District in the latter 1970s to inform people of their rights to house pattas. The campaign was given high priority. The District Collector issued very large numbers of handbills, and successfully persuaded politicians that they could gain credit by publicising the measure (pers. comm. S. Ray). A more recent example is the adult literacy drive in Ernakulam District in Kerala. One wonders whether there may not be many other opportunities for intensive campaigns of empowerment with enlightened political support.

Another positive example is the anti-corruption campaign at Ahmadpur, in Latur District (Joshi 1989). An NGO, the Ahmadpur Taluka Shetkari Sanghatana brought out a handbill which said: "Report a case of corruption and get the bribe-money back". Where the evidence was good, the Sanghatana contacted the concerned officials, presented them with the evidence, and politely requested them to pay back. "The response of the officials surprised even the most optimistic of the farmer activists". Reportedly, some asked for time to pay, but they did pay back, and the movement spread. Perhaps the empowerment of the handbills helped. And making knowledge of corruption public was the key in leveraging the money back.

One dimension is access of the public to information, such as Government Orders and other regulations. GOs concerning industry and trade are published in some national newspapers. GOs and administrative orders concerning rural development are evidently not. But GOs concerning rural development are liable to affect many more people, who are moreover much more widely dispersed. An example of a GO whose publication has been empowering and helpful is that issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests on 1st June 1990 concerning involvement of village communities and voluntary agencies for regeneration of degraded forest lands, published (albeit 2-3 months later) in Wastelands News. GOs concerning NGOs have tended not to be freely communicated. A 1988 order that NGO irrigation works built with government money could be inspected by DRDA staff instead of by the Irrigation Department was only discovered by a Gujarat NGO two years later by chance (pers. comm. Anil C. Shah).

The potential for empowering the poor through clarifying and publicising rights and other information appears large and growing for four reasons:

- i. demands for clarity. There is likely to be increasing demand by the poor for clarity of rights. (Developments with communities and Forests are an example of rapid change and new articulation of demands)
- ii. past oversight. Communicating rights has been relatively neglected in rural development.

iii. means. The means of communication are spreading and diversifying in many rural areas. Several modes (radio, television, video, newspapers) give direct access to increasing numbers of the poorer, bypassing those low-level officials who may stand to lose. These modes can be expected to spread rapidly in the 1990s. And older methods like widely distributed handbills remain ready to be used.

iv. open culture. Freedom of speech and communication are part of Indian culture, not least as a multi-party democracy which is enduring, stable and by far the world's largest. This extends to a degree of openness in government which is greater than in most countries of the South, and some in the North. (The British Government by comparison is paranoid and secretive: in the UK information on lead-free petrol was protected and withheld from the public under the Official Secrets Act; and I was once initially refused a copy ("It's not a public document") of a telegram which gave nothing more sensitive than my visa number for entry into the Sudan).

Several practical measures could follow:

- * The publication and dissemination of Government Orders concerning rural development, with intensive and widespread distribution, through many different media, including national and vernacular newspapers, the day after the Orders are issued.

- * Displays of rights. It could be required that notices proclaiming people's rights in local languages and scripts be displayed prominently and permanently in public places. For example, "outside each forest coupe or social forestry plantation there should be a notice board publicising what rights people have as regards collection." (TTHOTF pp220-221). Some ancient kings in Sri Lanka embodied such rights in carvings on stones. Perhaps new and very permanent forms of presentation could be devised.

- * Handbills. Widely distributed papers stating people's rights can give them a strong sense of entitlement, and provide something for them to wave in the faces of officials and others.

- * Broadcasts, telecasts, and video recordings by prominent political leaders and/or senior officials could tell people their rights, how to claim them, and how to protest if impeded or prevented.

Reversing Normal Professionalism and Bureaucracy

In the five specialised fields discussed above - canal irrigation, lift irrigation, watershed management, social forestry, and agricultural research and extension - reversals of normal bureaucracy and of normal professionalism present scope for gains by those who are poorer and weaker. The shifts and reversals needed for them to gain more in these domains are from things to people, from blueprint to process, from hardware to software, and from the uniform to the diverse. They manifest the three Ds - diversity, decentralisation, and effective demand by the deprived.

Those who are deprived and who would gain in canal irrigation are tailenders and others who receive unreliable water supplies. In lift irrigation they are the buyers, or would-be buyers, of water. In social forestry, they are the poorer, especially poor farm families and those who have or could have forest-based livelihoods. In watershed management, they are farm families, especially those with degraded land or who suffer from the negligence of neighbours. And in agricultural research and extension, they are the smaller poorer farmers, especially those in marginal and rainfed areas.

Detailed cases for reversals in these domains have been made elsewhere (see references). In summary, some of the more important are:

- * canal irrigation: reversing the obsession with physical works to stress system management, with an operational plan for each irrigation system, establishing irrigators' rights to information and to water, and representation of irrigators' groups, especially tailenders (MCI_236-242)

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* lift irrigation: in water abundant areas, in place of public tubewells, providing for competitive private markets for water through flat rate tariffs, through abolishing licensing and spacing regulations, and through intensive development (For water-abundant areas, and for different recommendations for water-scarce areas, see TTHOTP pp 132 - 140).

* watershed management: appraisal, planning and implementation by farmers (as being pioneered by MYRADA, the Karnataka Drylands Development Board, and the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme), with officials in an advisory, supportive and facilitating role

* social forestry: on public lands, shifting from single species production forestry to diverse livelihood forestry, planting and protecting a mix of "trees of the poor" and ensuring them rights of usufruct (TTHOTP 210 - 226)

* agricultural research and extension: for rainfed agriculture, changing from "transfer-of-technology" to "farmer first" approaches, from a package of practices to a basket of choices, with farmers participating in agricultural research and extension, determining priorities, making demands, requesting staff to search for what they want and need, and themselves experimenting (Farrington and Martin 1988, Amanor 1989, FF 1989); and improving the balance of research priorities between high status crops like wheat and rice and relatively neglected crops like coarse grains and some tubers, and between the large livestock (cattle, buffaloes) of the less poor to the relatively neglected smallstock like goats, sheep and poultry of the poorer.

All these implications entail reversals - from the lefthand side of the tables to the righthand side, from the centralised and standardised to the decentralised and diverse. All run counter to normal bureaucracy and normal professionalism. All therefore entail not just institutional and procedural change, but also change which is personal and individual.

Integrating Reversals: Participatory Rural Appraisal

The recent development of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) suggests a potential for supporting many reversals, both individual and institutional. In the past year, NGOs such as MYRADA based in Bangalore and the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme based in Ahmedabad, have made methodological breakthroughs in participatory approaches to learning and to rural development, and others such as ActionAid (Bangalore), SPEECH (Madurai), and Krishi Gram Vikas Kendra and other organisations (Ranchi) are also moving fast. A PRA network has been set up in Nepal. MYRADA has conducted over 30 field training experiences, many of them led by James Mascarenhas. To its credit, it has followed an "open door" policy and has welcomed to these regular exercises over 350 people from Government departments and other development institutions. MYRADA has also produced a series of reports and guides in the PRA/PALM (Participatory Learning Methods) series, of which the latest (Fernandez et al 1990) is a thoughtful review of the mass of experience gained by MYRADA in the past year.

PRA, a development of rapid (or now "relaxed") rural appraisal, is based on learning from, with, and by rural people, in their context, and with their concepts, and their criteria. Earlier approaches to learning were extractive. "We" went to rural areas and obtained data, brought it away and processed it, sometimes to see what we thought would be good for "them". Recently, new approaches and methods have made this more participatory. "We" still go to villages, but the data are shared, and the analysis is much more by rural people themselves.

Among the underlying theory and principles of PRA, six may be mentioned:

- * rapid and progressive learning - iterative, inventive, flexible and exploratory
- * reversals - learning from, with and by rural people, eliciting and using their criteria and categories
- * optimal ignorance and appropriate imprecision, that is, not finding out more than is needed, and not measuring more or more accurately than needed for practical purposes
- * triangulation - using different methods, sources and disciplines, and a range of informants in a range of places, and cross-checking with successive approximation
- * principal investigators, and senior people, in direct contact, face-to-face, with rural people in the field
- * self-critical awareness, doubt and embracing error

Two major sets of innovations and insights characterise PRA as it has been adopted and developed in India during the past twelve months.

The first is new participatory learning methods. These include participatory mapping and modelling, transects, analytical diagramming, ranking, scoring and estimating, wealth ranking, seasonal and livelihood analysis, and planning. In all of these the initiative in presenting and analysing information is passed to villagers. Frequently the information is represented in visible, public, and correctable form. The methods are proving both powerful and popular, and are spreading. The word "fun" is entering the rural development vocabulary. Villagers and outsiders usually enjoy the process and find it interesting.

The second concerns changes in attitude and behaviour on the part of outsiders. The insight here is that rural people have often appeared ignorant and incapable because "we" have put them down, lecturing not listening, teaching not learning, interrupting not waiting, and rushing. In consequence, we have underestimated their knowledge and analytical abilities. To enable them to express that knowledge and exercise that analytical ability, most outsiders need to behave differently, with modest personal demeanour, real interest in what people say, do and show, a keenness to learn, and a willingness to listen and not interrupt. Good rapport can also be gained by doing village tasks, with villagers as teachers, by sharing food, and by spending nights in villages.

The ultimate potential of PRA is hard to assess. There are dangers of instant popularity, bad implementation, and disillusion. PRA is still practised only on a tiny scale. In India, it is not yet, to my knowledge, part of the curriculum or practice of any university. Robert Rhoades (1990) has written about "The Coming Revolution in Rural Research", but the revolution at present is scarcely found in research at all. It is largely in the practices of few NGOs.

At the same time, requests for training from Government and NGOs far exceed the training capacity available. Formal and informal requests have been received from ICAR for the Krishi Vigyan Kendras, from MANAGE, from the Academy of Administration at Mussoorie for IAS probationers, from the National Forest Academy at Dehra Dun for IPS probationers, from the U.P. Academy of Administration at Nainital, and from quite a number of other state-level departments and organisations.

The first Government organisation to undertake full-scale training and reorientation is the Drylands Development Board in Karnataka. This can be regarded as a pilot project. Its Director began with some scepticism, but has experienced PRA personally, and has concluded that the approach and methods are powerful. With the assistance of MYRADA, the DLDB is now training its staff in fully participatory watershed planning and development, in which farmers do their own appraisals, make their own maps, and draw up their own plans. Officials provide support and advice, but do not dominate. In this case, a whole organisation, with 1600 professional staff in 20 districts, is seeking to change its culture and mode of operation.

Whatever cautious qualifications one wishes to make, it does seem that PRA has potential to integrate the themes of this paper. It is based on reversals of learning. It can take senior people to the field. It passes the initiative for teaching, learning and planning to villagers. It is in harmony with proposals for ecologically sound and participatory rural development (see e.g. Agarwal and Narain 1989). Done well, it involves and empowers the poorer people. It should then lead to development which meets their priorities, and which is more sustainable, by them. Through its decentralised nature, it takes account of local diversity. Perhaps most important, it enables outsiders to learn, and to change. For outsiders, PRA's greatest potential may be personal reorientation and liberation from inappropriate professionalism. Perhaps it will prove to be a feasible means for multiple simultaneous change, both personal and institutional.

The question can then be asked, but not yet answered, whether, with the accelerating changes taking place in the world, there is now a possibility of large-scale transformation of field bureaucracies, as well as of NGOs, with PRA as one spearhead of change.

Promoting Personal Change: Reorientation in Careers and Learning

Stereotypes of rent-seeking officials, wicked contractors, and corrupt politicians can depress and mislead. I will assert as a personal opinion that there are vast numbers of people, not just in the NGO sector, but also in government organisations, in politics, and in business, who wish to do good work and to help the poor. Partly they are trapped in "the system". Partly, they are waiting for opportunities for change. The reversals here are personal. They are to offset the biases of careers which lead inwards and upwards, away from rural realities. They are to spend time regularly close to rural life. They are to learn from and with rural people. They are to get honest and accurate feedback on programmes. They are to keep up to date with rural change. And they are to work to empower the poor.

As a start, on these lines, some practical suggestions include:

- * overnights in villages. Senior officials could be required to spend time, including overnights, in villages without a formal programme (not always a new measure, but perhaps one deserving renewal and reinforcement, as recently in Uttar Pradesh)
- * mini-sabbaticals (TTHOTF:240). Officials could have mini-sabbaticals to conduct investigations in a PRA mode in villages, especially concerning aspects of programmes for which they are responsible
- * learning from the DLDB. The experience of the DLDB in Karnataka could be monitored to assess whether, and if so how, PRA should be introduced selectively into other Government organisations and departments.
- * training trainers. The training of trainers in PRA could be given priority to try to meet current demand.

Concluding with Questions

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In this paper there is a sense of being on the brink of rapid changes in the professions and organisations concerned with rural development. Many of these changes entail reversing normal values and behaviour, and seeing things from the point of view, not of urban-based outsider professionals, but of poor rural people. Such reversals imply a new directions and an additional rural development agenda.

Do the directions and actions in this paper make sense and are they implementable?

If not, why not? And what instead should the directions and actions be?

But if so, then what should be done, by whom, how, and how soon?

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SOME SOURCES OF SUPPORTING EVIDENCE AND ARGUMENT

I regret the egocentricity of this list of sources, but they contain supporting evidence and arguments for some of the assertions in this paper. I also wish to acknowledge a very heavy debt, evident enough in this paper, to N.C. Saxena and Tushaar Shah for their joint authorship of To the Hands of the Poor: Water and Trees. Should any reader wish to obtain copies of any of these documents, I shall be glad to try to obtain and send them, or to indicate how they can be obtained.

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(IDS refers to the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK)

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